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Questionnaire study designed to discover amount of tension, desirable or otherwise, which student teachers may have encountered in their relations with others during periods of observing and practice teaching.

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# HUMAN RELATIONS IN ACTION WITH STUDENT TEACHERS

By Sister Mary Zeno, S.S.N.D.*

TODAY'S CHILDREN ARE REACHING for the moon. So tomorrow's teachers, who are currently doing their observation and practice teaching for certification in our schools, enter this space-conscious educational dichotomy where earthbound children seek to scale the skies and where also a tense challenge, felt even by the veteran teacher, taunts them.

Each student teacher finds that he is the leading member in a team including his college supervisor, his college teachers, his supervising teacher, the school principal, his colleagues, the pupils, and every member of the personnel. He cannot operate in a vacuum; he is not sealed in a Sputnik. His success or failure depends upon good human relations.

In the larger framework of education, human relations is no mere dispensation of good will and kindness proffered by benevolent "do-gooders" in the system. It is a forthright study of the powerful human factors that spark the educational process. Indeed, considered as a vital element in effective observation and practice teaching, human relations is realized in an understanding of the human side of the teacher-leader role.[1]

However, in the course of the vital teamwork student teaching necessitates, it is likely that there will be considerable tension. One is led to inquire what the origin and nature of this tension may be and whether it is a destructive factor in the program. It is here proposed to question the future teachers themselves regarding their personal experience during the period of observing and practice teaching, and to discover the amount of tension, desirable or otherwise, which they may have encountered in their relations with others during that period.

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[1] Lloyd and Elaine Cook, *School Problems in Human Relations* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., Inc., 1957), p. 3.



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## RELATED LITERATURE

To be sure informative articles and books have recently clarified the roles of persons concerned with the program of student teaching completely, emphasizing the principles of good leadership, the effort to build morale,the test of showing personal interest in the personality of the student teacher and the supervising teacher in all that relates to their success; the ability to offer help—methods—and techniques to those who need them; and finally the demonstration that for growth and enthusiasm, rapport is a *must.* In conclusion the best organization emerges as people work together.[2] In fact very many student teaching textbooks basically discuss human relations but under other names. Sam P. Wiggins seems to pioneer in making it prominent in his text, *The Student Teacher in Action,* which begins with a chapter entitled, "Human Relations in Action." Besides setting the stage for a fair play of good human relations the book is a storehouse of bibliography concerning the subject which is quite up-to-date.[3]

## DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Nevertheless, it is precisely because the textbooks and articles are probably written by teachers or professors (on the other side of the desk) and therefore outside the extremely personal area in which this study is concentrated, and because the students themselves have never voiced the consensus of their opinions about human relations in student teaching, that this study was deemed advisable. And since tension mounts as persons become involved in an enterprise, it was assumed that tension would probably be inextricably involved in the human elements of student teaching.

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[2] C. S. Fitz, *The Roles of the Principal, the College Supervisor, and the Supervising Teacher in the Student Teaching Program,* Digested in *Immaculate Heart College Research Newsletter,* II, No. 3 (April, 1957), 3-4.
M. G. Oelke and R. E. Schultz, "Functions of the Teacher Training Supervisor in Internship Programs," *Educational Administration and Supervision,* XLII, No. 4 (April, 1956), 244-251.
A. F. Perroden, "The Principal and the Student Teacher," *Educational Administration and Supervision,* XLIII, No. 4 (April, 1957), 27-30.
H. Whiting, "Internship of Supervising Teachers and Its Appraisal," *Educational Administration and Supervision,* XLIII, No. 1 (January, 1957), 23-32.

[3] Sam P. Wiggins, *The Student Teacher in Action* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1957).

### METHOD OF PROCEDURE

With this theory in mind a questionnaire was formulated and presented directly to student teachers. The following six points were included:

1. List in the order of preference the five factors that are (or have been) most responsible for your adjustment in student teaching.
2. List in the order of importance the few factors that made student teaching unpleasant.
3. Were you ever tense or nervous during the period of your observation and practice teaching?
4. Did your relationship with the pupils, the supervising teacher, or the principal cause this tension?
5. Are you a religious, layman, or woman teacher?
6. Comments. .....

In the beginning 135 questionnaires were distributed to student teachers actually enrolled as practice teachers in six different teacher training institutions in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Students responded from all six colleges except one. As soon as the forms were returned, with no other identification than status and sex, they were mixed, since no reason existed for distinguishing data of a specific institution as such. Cumulative lists of answers were set up, tabulated and classified for analysis.

The number of questionnaires filled out and returned was 112, or 83 per cent of the 135 sent out, which represented 32 religious, 2 priests, and 78 future lay teachers. By the consideration given the questions and consequent replies they evidenced a co-operative interest in the problem and a lively awareness of the true perspective of the values in human relations in beginning teaching.

### FAVORABLE FACTORS

The first question about the factors considered most responsible for adjusting favorably in the student teaching program evoked "fifty-seven varieties" of reply. Being an open-end question, it was supposed to do just that. After close inspection it was noticed that all of the students' reasons for success were merely evidences that

they had enjoyed the realization of satisfaction of basic personal needs. Therefore the answers are lumped together according to the principles of man's basic needs; namely, the need for acceptance, security, affection, prestige, accomplishment, and freedom. Table 1 shows the approximate breakdown into these categories.

TABLE 1

STUDENT TEACHERS' REASONS FOR SUCCESS GROUPED ACCORDING TO SATISFACTION OF BASIC NEEDS

| Acceptance—student evidence of reasons depended on the state of belonging, of being counted in. | No. of same reasons |
|---|---|
| My supervising teacher's interest in my work | 71 |
| Principal's concern and interest encouragement | 18 |
| Instructions in lesson planning | 11 |
| Way of acquainting me with materials | 6 |
| Acceptance by faculty | 6 |
| Way I was supervised—constructive criticism | 5 |
| Confidence shared with me about pupils and program | 3 |
| Supervising teacher and others shared knowledge with me | 3 |
| Acceptance by pastor | 2 |
| Encouragement by consultant | 2 |
| **Security—state of being non-threatened in position gained from the following** | |
| Principles learned in courses | 68 |
| College courses | 27 |
| Interest and help of my college teachers | 25 |
| Guidance from my college supervisor | 19 |
| Order and discipline in school in which I taught | 13 |
| Atmosphere of friendliness and permissiveness | 11 |
| General good atmosphere, equipment and textbooks | 10 |
| Class in practice teaching | 10 |
| Discussion with my classmates | 8 |
| College training | 7 |
| Former teaching and playground experience | 4 |
| Supervision of my work | 3 |
| Teaching with a partner | 1 |

TABLE 1 — *Continued*

| Affection is being counted in with warmth. | No. of same reasons |
|---|---|
| Warm acceptance by faculty and pupils | 16 |
| Kindness of staff to me | 14 |
| Way in which I was informed of things | 12 |
| Being warmly counted in with faculty | 10 |
| Realization that others want and need me | 10 |
| Generosity of the faculty | 4 |
| **Prestige is being counted in with recognition, approval— a degree of importance.** | |
| Attitude of approval shown by my supervising teacher | 13 |
| General respect shown me as if I were "special" | 10 |
| Respect shown me as if I really count | 5 |
| **Accomplishment is a sense of importance in what I do.** | |
| Allowed me to take over a class completely | 22 |
| Evident confidence placed in me while I taught | 5 |
| **Freedom is the state of not being dependent upon things.** | |
| Freedom to choose my own methods | 5 |
| Freedom offered by principal and others | 4 |
| Total | 467 |

### STUDENT TEACHERS' PERSONAL ATTITUDES

Concepts of the student teachers' personal attitudes about things conducive to good human relations in the school situation are indicated in Table 2; whereas, the realization of the value of communication as a success factor in teaching is portrayed in Table 3.[4]

The student teachers' concern with the value of effort to overcome initial tensions is admirable. Experienced teachers can testify to the value of individual effort in overcoming nearly all the difficulties to be faced in the classroom.

[4] Tables 1, 2, and 3 were all derived from Question 1 of the questionnaire.

TABLE 2

ATTITUDES OR HABITUAL WAYS OF THINKING AND FEELING ABOUT SOME PERSON, PLACE, ISSUE, OR THING, WHICH GET ME READY FOR ACTION

| My success may be attributed to— | No. of same opinions |
|---|---|
| Effort to overcome tension at its first appearance | 10 |
| Love of children | 6 |
| Desire to teach | 6 |
| Love of teaching | 4 |
| Yearning to know people better | 3 |
| Ease of adjustment | 3 |
| Right attitudes toward teachers and education | 3 |
| Possession of good common sense | 2 |
| No worry about course grade | 1 |
| Ability to get along with people | 1 |
| Deep interest in youth | 1 |
| High regard for education | 1 |
| Total | 41 |

TABLE 3

COMMUNICATION OR EXCHANGING IDEAS, CONCEPTS, DESIRES, HOPES, FEELINGS, WISHES, ANXIETIES, FEARS IN TERMS OF NEEDS

| Felt need on the part of students to master communication | Number of Teachers |
|---|---|
| Grew in ability to organize and present a lesson plan | 5 |
| Help from discussion with faculty members outside class time | 4 |
| Gained ability to speak before a group | 4 |
| Opportunity for varied modes of expression in planning | 3 |
| Learned to give clear distinct directions | 1 |
| Kept my tone of voice low but distinct | 1 |
| Total | 18 |

UNPLEASANT FEATURES OF STUDENT TEACHING

As might be expected the students' lists of unpleasant features experienced in observation and practice teaching fall into categories that negate man's basic needs; that is, they show insecurity, non-acceptance, no affection, neither a sense of accomplishment nor of prestige, and finally a considerable want of freedom. These are listed in Table 4.[5]

TABLE 4

THREATS TO BASIC NEEDS OF MAN HAMPERING THE TEACHERS

| Threats to good teaching apparent in the following: | Number of Teachers |
|---|---|
| *Insecurity* | |
| College program too heavy | 15 |
| Lack of preparation | 12 |
| Teacher bluffs | 1 |
| Presence of a study period group while student is trying to teach | 1 |
| Overcrowded classroom | 1 |
| Bad relations between teachers | 1 |
| No chance for student teacher to correct his errors | 1 |
| *Non-Acceptance* | |
| Students did not accept me | 11 |
| Poor discipline | 9 |
| Lack of rapport | 1 |
| *Non-Affection* | |
| Supervising teacher interrupted me while I was teaching to call pupils "stupid" | 1 |
| Supervising teacher was unfair to pupils | 2 |
| Supervising teacher nagged | 1 |
| My presence appeared to be a hardship for the principal | 1 |
| *No Sense of Accomplishment or Prestige* | |
| Supervising teacher was rarely available for consultation | 4 |
| Sitting around with nothing to do | 1 |
| Supervising teacher corrected my class for me | 1 |

[5] Table 4 was drawn up on the basis of replies to Question 2 of the questionnaire.

TABLE 4 — *Continued*

| Threats to good teaching apparent in the following: | Number of Teachers |
|---|---|
| *No Freedom* | |
| Lack of time | 8 |
| Want of freedom | 2 |
| My resentment of college supervisor | 2 |
| Resented supervision by my supervising teacher | 1 |
| Too much homework to correct | 1 |
| Too many lesson plans to submit | 1 |
| Too much observation | 1 |
| *Very Poor Self Concepts based on —* | |
| Sense of insecurity | 1 |
| Sense of inadequacy | 1 |
| Lost confidence in myself and am unhappy over my student teaching results | 1 |
| I feel that I was imposing on the school in which I taught | 1 |
| I attributed a false attitude to my supervising teacher | 1 |
| Total | 185 |

Asked if they had experienced tension during the period of observation and practice teaching, 80 of the students had, but 32 had endured no sense of tension whatever. Those sensitive to some form of tension attributed it to the causes described in Table 5 as revealed in answers to the fourth question.

### CHALLENGING YET TRYING EXPERIENCE

Here one may observe that a strong antithesis exists between the positive aspects in human relations of Table 1 which undeniably credit success in student teaching to a milieu rich in satisfaction for the needs of man's being on the one hand and the stark negativism of Table 2 which dries up the very source of student learning by denying him the same satisfying experiences on the other hand. Being secure, accepted, loved, revered, free and respected usually changes the timid young person into a warm, serious, vibrant individual. It encourages endeavor and enterprise.

TABLE 5

CAUSES OF TENSION AMONG STUDENT TEACHERS

| Cause | Number of Teachers |
|---|---|
| 1. *It was natural as the result of my inexperience* | 25 |
| 2. The sense of responsibility made me tense | 4 |
| 3. I felt inadequate | 7 |
| 4. I was not properly prepared | 5 |
| 5. I have an inferiority complex and was embarrassed | 4 |
| 6. Tension arose from relationship with supervising teachers | 8 |
| 7. Tension between student teacher and pupils | 9 |
| 8. Tension between student and college supervisor | 2 |
| 9. Tension between student and principal | 1 |
| 10. Supervision invited tension in the following instances: | |
| a. Presence of supervising teacher | 11 |
| b. Presence of supervising teacher and principal | 1 |
| c. Presence of supervising teacher, college supervisor and companion student teacher | 1 |
| d. Supervision of any kind | 2 |

Taken on face value student teaching is a new, challenging experience, but also a very trying one. Concerning it one lay teacher admitted that "student teaching is a frustrating experience at first, yet so valuable it seems impossible that anyone could attempt to teach without this experience." Still this teacher (in her own words) was accepted as an equal at the school and was treated patiently and with understanding. The children gave her friendly responses and the superiors showed marked interest in her. She was "let in" on confidences concerning the daily programs and student problems. How differently this person would have felt in an adverse atmosphere charged with indifference or hostility. Perhaps the comment of another teacher who said, "Teaching is definitely a profession that should be well thought about before making a decision to follow it," is more to the point.

In similar vein another layman suggested that "more work needs to be done in setting up a more comfortable relationship between the student teacher and the administrative personnel on the secondary level, along with a critic teacher, in-service training program". This observation may have been due to three factors that had militated against the positive satisfaction he received from his course. They included "lack of discipline, lack of preparation, and the poor administration of the student teaching."

Now moving from the specific to the over-all picture one sees the scene brighten. Someone has said that basic needs are those which must be satisfied if man is to attain the highest possible fulfillment of his potentialities. If the 526 positive comments showing fulfillment of those needs, right attitudes, and strengthened communication have any weight in comparison with the 85 negative counts, it is well to remember that human relationships add up to 86 per cent as a positive force, as against 14 per cent of unfortunate poor accord. Through the 14 per cent much vitality is lost to the program and to future teachers.

In spite of this leakage, Table 2 shows that student concepts of their own attitudes are clear and objective and that they are developing habits of feeling and thinking constructively about their work, an activity that will be transferred into their later duties. This is the time for the personnel to assist them in strengthening desirable attitudes towards themselves, towards the administration, towards general education, towards the children and the whole kingdom of schooldom.

Few students remarked about the felt need to master communication; but those who did acknowledged their attempts to organize and present lesson plans, or speak before the class, as very real successes in their lives. To speak low and distinctly and to give directions succinctly are goals in keeping with a teacher's social and professional life. Elementary as these may appear, they are achievements for the timid and insecure.

## CONCLUSION

Tension was decidedly felt by 80 of these future teachers; whereas 32 experienced no sign of it. Again 29 of these 80 recognized it as a normal component of the newness of the situation in which they

found themselves and the awareness of new responsibilities like the religious who wrote:

> This tension was caused by the anticipation of facing a group as a teacher for the first time; there was also some tension built up by the realization of the responsibility to prepare so thoroughly in so little time. On a whole, I think any tension produced was of a desirable nature as it made one give the best she possibly could.

Sixteen others were tense because of their own sense of youthful inadequacy or inferiority. This narrows the tension caused by conflicting relationships with personnel and under supervision down to 25 examples, which is 22 per cent of the total exposed to it.

Since the results show 80 out of 112 persons conscious of tension, and despite the fact that only 22 per cent of it was of a vitiating nature, the assumption made prior to this study is inextricably intersticed within the framework of an observation and practice teaching program.

## RECOMMENDATION

Whereas 86 per cent of the student teacher reactions showed basic needs satisfied for students in the program while 14 per cent were at the same time deprived of them; and since 22 per cent of the same students endured tension, which (carried to the extreme) could prove disastrous, it seems that those conducting teacher training classes ought to re-evaluate them and, in the light of human relations, approach an understanding of the human side of the teacher-leader relationship. This accomplished, readjustments would be in order. Neither the college, the school, the college supervisor, the principal, any supervising teachers, any student, nor any one of the personnel should be in doubt about his role in the whole picture.

Special emphasis should rest upon each teacher's understanding of himself, primarily, then his pupils, and those about him, and God in them all, himself included. Awareness like this moved one student to list the grace of God as the element most responsible for her success in student teaching. As a matter of fact intelligent, cooperative effort applied to the aims, objectives, techniques, and principles of student teaching, and allied to those of warm human relations that permeate the program will produce creative teachers reflecting to a finite degree the skill of the Master Teacher.